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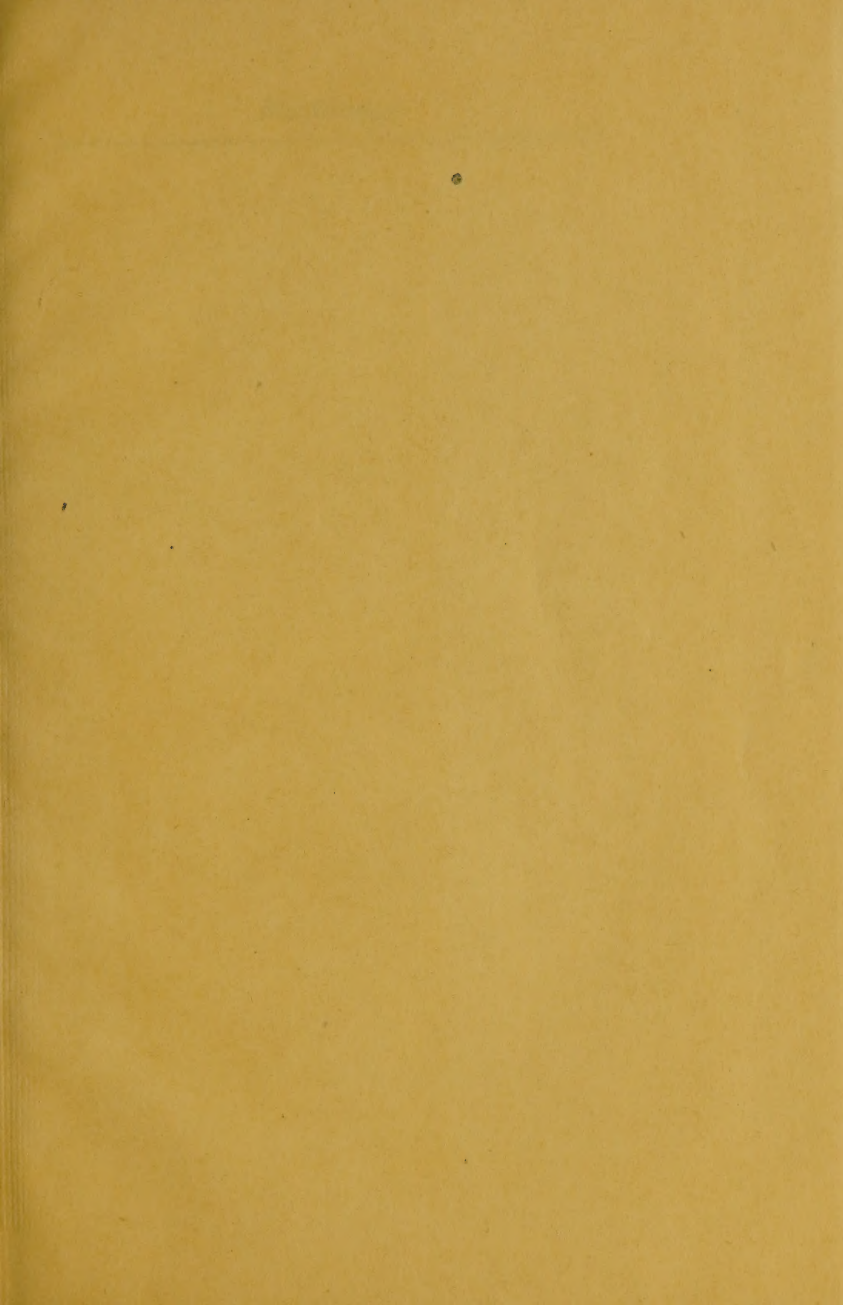
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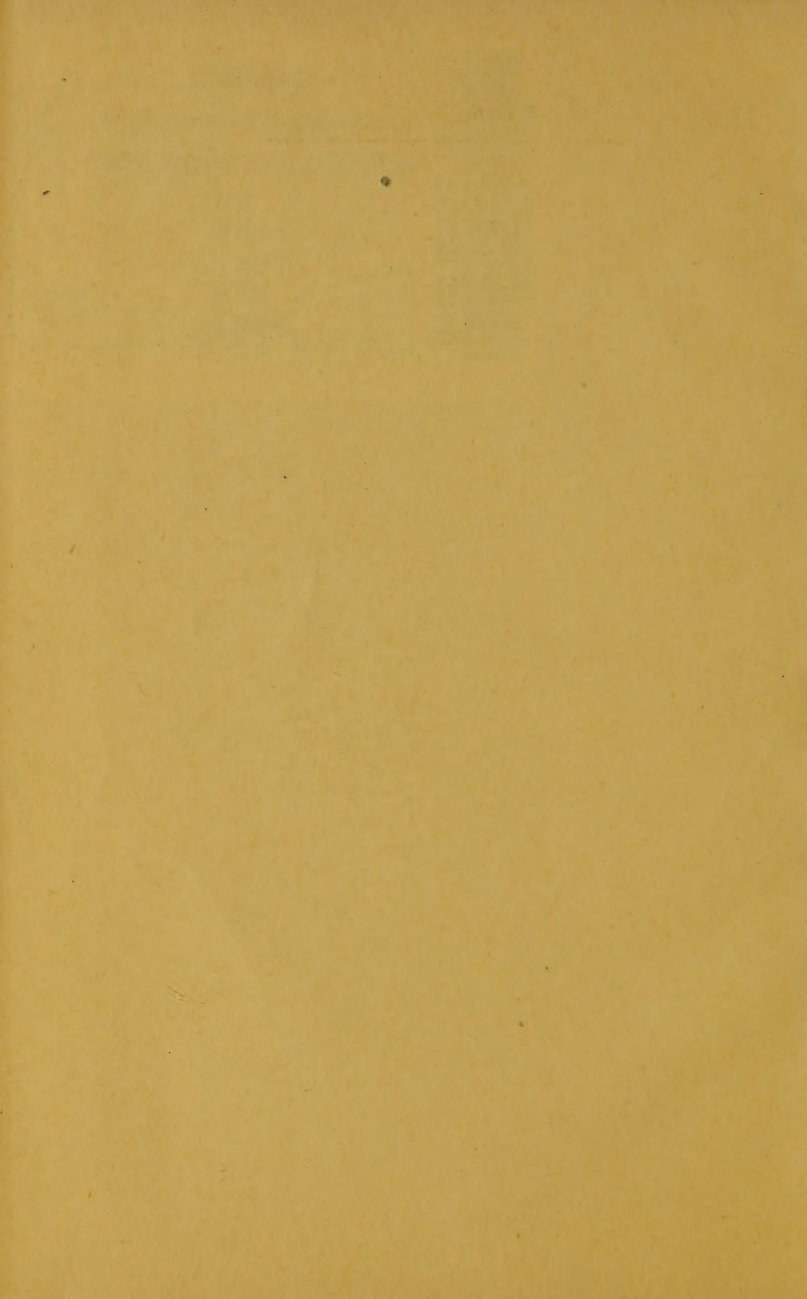
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Mapirunga

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W. B. Cunningham 

GUSTAVO BARROSO

MAPIRUNGA

TRANSLATED

and with

EXPLANATORY PREFACE

by

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

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EXPLANATORY PREFACE

MAPIRUNGA, the story I have translated,¹ was written by Senhor Gustavo Barroso, a Brazilian author of repute, who writes under the pseudonym of João do Norte, that is John of the North. It treats of life some five and twenty years ago, in the Sertão.

Senhor Barroso has made the life of the Sertão peculiarly his own. What then is the Sertão and where in thunder is it? as Mr. Elihu Root said to the late Don Santiago Perez Triana, when he was informed that Bogota was the city where the then Colombian minister was born.

Sertão cannot be rendered exactly by one word, in English. It may be defined though, and a good definition often enables one to see more clearly than an indifferent, but exact, translation.

There are words in every language impossible to give the exact meaning of in any other tongue, but that in which they took their birth, and became rounded and fashioned in the

¹ I have not translated word by word; but have endeavoured to preserve the spirit of the text.

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current of men's speech, as pebbles lose their edges and become spherical in the current of a stream.

Of these, there is a word in Portuguese, 'saudade,' that implies a recollection tinged with sadness. It almost defies translation in one word in English, and I think in French. The Spaniards have their 'añoranza,' a word beautiful in itself that comes the nearest to it, for Spaniards and Portuguese are cousins-german, and esteem each other or one another (I think, 'l'un et l'autre se disent,' in the words of the grammarian about to bid good-bye for ever to the Hornbook and the Criss-Cross Row), after the fashion so often to be observed in those of the same blood.

This brings me back again, logicians may say how or why, to the definition of Sertão.

I had thought of Trossachs as an equivalent, for it is said to mean a broken land of hills ; but soon gave up the idea, feeling that Trossachs was as strange a word to Saxon ears as if it were Sertão, and then the Trossachs is a little district, and the Sertão larger than France or Spain.

It may be that the thought passed through my mind because I was a doubtful native of the Trossachs district, as books on botany say of a plant that has run wild out of a garden and be-

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come naturalized. At least if, after all the years that I have wandered up and down the world, seeking for peace and finding it wherever there was grass and water for my horse, I have saudades of any place on earth, it must be of the turning in the hill road from Aberfoyle that opens up the view of Loch Achray.

Down that steep, winding road in fine and rainy weather (but mostly rainy, I admit), have I ridden Pampa, my black Argentine, on whom one day I hope to ride again, when I have joined him somewhere or another, for a plague upon your heaven where a man has got to go afoot.

The hill track has become a motor road, haunted by chars-à-bancs, stuffed full of heterogeneous samples of the genus homo, drawn from all lands on earth.

Pampa now pastures, as I hope, in Trapalanda, the Indians' heaven, for he came from the Estancia de Curamulán, and had Edwardo Casey's brand upon his near hind leg. In those days the Estancia was on the Indian frontier, and with its pasto seco and gramilla, its clear streams coming from the hills above Tandil, its flocks of ostriches (Mirth of the Desert, as the Gauchos called them), and herds of deer, its Vizcachas sitting by their holes, its flights of Magellanic swans, and teruterus ever crying, was so like to what I fancy Trapalanda is, that

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Pampa hardly would see the difference between the paradise and his 'querencia.'

Ah, I am up against it once again, for no one word in English can express 'querencia.' It means not only the place where a horse is born, but his love for the place. Curamulán is altered too, and now cut into squares with barbed wire fences, the ostriches and deer probably all killed, and the long-horned Criollo cattle replaced by shorthorns or by Herefords.

Hill road, Curamulán, and Pampa, all are gone, but I retain 'saudades' of them and shall do down to my last hour.

I think now I have made plain the meaning of 'saudades,' and this once more brings me back to the Sertão.

Between the States of Bahia, Ceará, and Piauhý, there is a hilly district, about three thousand feet above sea level, back-lying, as we say in Scotland, sun-scorched and arid to an incredible degree. The vegetation is all hard and thorny, the grass is wiry, and almost impenetrable thickets of low scrub spread over vast extents. Palms, Joazeiros, Ipés and Mangabeiras, Jacarandás and Inhambús, with Carnaubas and a thousand more tower up in the more fertile valleys, all bound together with the thick cordage of the lianas, that winding round their trunks, envelop all the branches, and

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growing upwards towards the light, crown the tree-tops with flowers.

These trees all have their scientific names, no whit less barbarous than those the Indians gave, and far less picturesque.

I set down some of them, as *Astromen Fraxinifolia*, *Hancorina Speciosa*, *Myroxylon Periferum*, and *Spondius Tuberosa*, so that my readers may decide whether the Indians or the botanists are entitled to the palm.

In the dense underwood live jaguars, ounces, wild-cats, ant-bears, and peccaries. These too have Indian names, and just as it has happened to the trees, naturalists have baptized them with terms taken out of their own peculiar jargon, and have been satisfied when they could find a sesquipedalian appellation to fit to some small unoffending beast.

The Sertão in general is a cattle-breeding district, well stocked with the descendants of the long-horned beasts the conquerors brought from Portugal. Horses are plentiful, small, tough, and untiring, and nearly all of them have artificial gaits. These gaits, once common throughout Europe, now are confined to Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and nearly all the countries of the East. Rack,¹ Pace and Overpace, Foxtrot

¹ *Estrada baixa*, *Estrada alta*, *Meia-marcha*, *Marcha*, *Baralha*, *Esquipado*.

and Single-foot, our ancestors all knew them, and the phrase ' on his ambling mule ' is frequent in old books that tell of monks and abbots on their journeyings.

The herdsmen of the district all dress in leather, even their horses wear a panoply of hide, making them look like armadillos, to protect them from the thorns. Their riders, usually men of middle stature with a strong tinge of Indian or of Negro blood, but generally Indian, are strong athletic men, born on their horses, so to speak, and managing the lazo or the trident equally well.

As dexterous as the Mexicans, or the Llaneros, of the great plains of Venezuela, when they have grasped a bullock by the tail, that bullock falls upon his side, as certainly as a good shot brings down a rocketeer at a hot corner in a wood.

This feat is known as ' A Saiada,' and when well performed it leaves the animal for a few moments as senseless as a prize-fighter when his opponent's fist has found the mark.

Then with a bound the Sertanejo throws himself from his horse, and lifting one of the prone beast's forelegs, puts it up over his long horn, and leaves him helpless on the ground.

Unlike the Gauchos of the southern plains, the Mexicans or the cowboys of the West, and

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other men who pass their lives on horseback, the Sertanejos seem to have no pride either in their own or in their horses' looks.

They never stick their feet out and defy the thunder, letting their silver spurs fall loosely from their high-heeled boots, as they ride slowly by.

They rarely indulge in what Caucasians call the 'jigitofka,' checking their horses at full speed, turning them in the air, or picking up their hats from off the ground, with a wild yell, as they regain their seat. In the story that I have translated there is a perfect picture of a Sertanejo, apparently so slothful, on his thin, listless-looking horse.

Let but the occasion present itself and that same slothful-looking pair becomes a centaur, rushing through the thickest bush, dodging the trees, now stooping down to pass beneath an overhanging branch, now leaping fallen logs, struggling through quagmires, untiring and tenacious of the chase.

No one, but they, in all the world of horsemen, could make a passage through the thorny bush that closes after them, leaving as little traces of their passages as a bird leaves when diving through the air. They, and they only, in their leather armour, can ride the bush of the Sertão. Australians, Mexicans, Gauchos, and

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cowboys would emerge a mass of blood and tatters from it, if they emerged alive. Even these hide-clad warriors are often killed, dashed against trees, impaled upon a broken splinter of bamboo, or maimed for life, when hunting cattle in the dense bush of the Sertão.

Their country, sun - scorched and arid, scourged ever and anon by droughts, so terrible, that nearly all the cattle perish and half the population has to emigrate, is a fit home for the lean, hide-clad centaurs who inhabit it. In this hard land of sun and drought, the home of a rough feudalism received from Portugal long centuries ago when first the land was conquered, is laid the scene of *Mapirunga*, a tale so wild, and so unlike in all its aspects to modern life in Europe, that I should have hesitated to translate it, had I not seen and lived with men exactly like the types that it contains.

Mixed blood and isolation, with the inherent mysticism of the Portuguese, the superstitions that the people have inherited, both from the Negroes and Indians, have led to the formation of a life unique in all the world.

The types, the life, with the revenge of *Mapirunga*, the death of the old colonel, clear grit to the end, the *cangaçeiro*,¹ and the

¹ Bravo.

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vaquero in his leather panoply, on his lean pacing horse, whose very name of 'quartau preto'¹ e bebe em branco' is extraordinarily picturesque and graphic, speak of a world distant a thousand leagues from anything we know.

Such stories and such types must of necessity be caviare to the general ; but now and then it may act as a tonic to the mind to stray outside the pale of introspection and the analysis of motives, scarce worth analysing.

There still are countries and societies where men wear scapularies around their necks, believe in werewolves, reverence the saints, mount to the saddle lightly in one motion, just as a roe leaps over a wire fence, not climbing to their backs like bricklayers going up a ladder laden with a hod, and where affairs of honour are still settled with the long Parnahyba knife, or jacaré, and not in law-courts, to be reported in the papers for fools to snigger at.

They will all pass away, will pass irrevocably, just as the mist that wreathes about the hills and fills the corries with its steam, melts and leaves nothing of itself, except a memory that we think of now and then, as if we had lost something of ourselves, real, but intangible.

It seems to me that in the tale of Mapirunga,

¹ Black horse that drinks in white, *i.e.* has a white face.

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Senhor Barroso has performed a service to his country, by setting down that which so soon will become history. I have translated it, on account of those 'saudades,' that I think I have explained.

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

MAPIRUNGA

JOÃO FERREIRA, known as Mapirunga, was a tenant of Colonel Lupercio in some good plough-land on the estate of São Miguel, that extended to about three leagues of cultivated ground and pasturage, copses and jungle, from the foot of the hills of Francos to the bank of the Riacho do Sangue.

He lived with his mother, his brother, and his sister in a little thatched mud hut on the bank of the Bio-Gordo creek, shaded by three tall myrtaceous trees, in which at daybreak every morning sang a multitude of birds. Antonio, his brother, was the best hunter of the district, and as great a rustic song-maker as the celebrated Gerome do Junqueiro who was immortalized as

*‘ Sou Gerome do Junqueiro
Da fala branda e macia
Pisó no chão devagar
Que a folha sêcca não chia.’*

During the week both brothers worked at cutting brushwood, felling trees, at digging drinking holes for cattle, or took small con-

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tracts for enclosing land, either with snake fences, stockades, or with barbed wire. Seldom on Sundays did they go to Mass, or to the merry-makings at the neighbouring villages. Instead, they usually buried themselves in the thick woods that fringed the hills, to hunt the game, that, though abundant, yet was very shy.

In this diversion, the man of song was far inferior to his brother Mapirunga, whose exceptional abilities as a fowler were proclaimed and recognized by all.

He never returned home without bringing back his hunting bag of wild catskin empty of cartridges, and, hanging from his belt, a string of game. No one understood as well as he the exact charge every gun required, for he was not one of those who are bound to the exact measure marked on the neck of powder flasks, or on the nozzle of a shot pouch.

His knowing eye calculated better far the quantity required, in his open hand, either for shot, slugs, or bullets, both for a short and a long range. At the first glance he saw the qualities and the defects of any weapon without trying it.

Pressing his hand, palm downwards, on the muzzle of the gun, he calculated by the impression made on its thick yellow skin, how much shot the gun required for any distance.

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It was all one to him to shoot with his heavy carbine, with a flint-lock blunderbuss, or a long trade gun. With a rifle from the United States, of forty-five calibre, he never missed a shot. They said that he had spells¹ to bring the game to him, and that he possessed a fetich that brought him luck and the good will of all. This fetich he placated with a good ration of mapinguin tobacco. Never animal or bird that could escape him, neither the black ibises always alert upon the edges of the streams, the vigilant Jacús,² hidden in the branches of the Jatobás,³ the wood deer, or any other kind of game, either in their lairs, or at their drinking places.

No one would wait more patiently to shoot mocós,⁴ or knew more ways of forcing them to bolt out of their holes.

In fact, he was a sort of sylvan demon, like the Caipora,⁵ the chief and master of the forest beasts, who, as all know, on moonlight nights, rides on a peccary.

Both brothers were obliging and good workers,

¹ Mandingas, *i.e.* charms from the Mandingo negroes.

² A large bird of the Penelope family, known as Paujil in Columbia and Venezuela.

³ A tree of the *Hymenæa* genus.

⁴ The mocó is a little animal of the guinea-pig family.

⁵ The Caipora is a wood demon much talked of by country people in Brazil, and seen occasionally by those whose sight is not blurred, or senses dulled by education.

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a little savage in their ways, but honest, preferring to live in peace in their own corner, and not bothering themselves much either with the joys or griefs of other men.

They lived in relative prosperity, and often thought of buying some good land from old Simon Machado, upon the further side of a neighbouring range of hills. God appeared to prosper them, for never did the red grub ravage the cotton field that their old mother had planted, just behind the house, nor did the parroquets devour the maize that grew close to the stream.

Their mother was nearing sixty years of age, and the rough agricultural work of the Sertão had broken down her health. She suffered much from palpitations, and passed her life in drinking all sorts of concoctions made of herbs.

She had been one of the handsomest of the girls in the town of Cachoeira, and used to like to tell of how she fled from home mounted behind her husband, old Ferreira, at that time a strong, handsome youth. Whenever she recounted the adventure, her husband used to mutter to himself, a little ashamed before his sons or visitors, that it was not worth while to stir about dry leaves.

Old Ferreira had been a cowboy in his youth, and nearly met his death when looking for a

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wild steer in the bush, stuck on a splintered cane that pierced between his ribs. He luckily escaped, but could not work again amongst the cattle, and found himself obliged to seek his livelihood in the rubber forests of the Amazon. Ten years had passed without the family having heard of him, and so they thought he must have died of beri-beri or of a fever of some sort.

The daughter, Luíza, generally was known as Luizinha, a pet name given her by her godfather, Manco de Paula, a landowner in the district of Tatú Mondé, who had died of a stroke of wind.¹ Luíza, who was nineteen years of age, had grown up spoiled by her family. Her long black eyelashes obscured the fire of her black eyes. The undulations of her supple body, for she had all the half-breed's grace, had turned the heads of all the youths throughout the neighbourhood.

She was a real beauty, was that little devil, as Xico da Miguelina, one of her admirers, used to swear, but without any bitterness, although she had refused him, though he was the only son of Simon Pacheco, who had seven cattle farms in Quixeramobim and sent great droves of bullocks to the capital and to Pará, and as Ze Benevides, a clever man and one who under-

¹ Ar-do-Vento.

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stood things, used to affirm, drank his coffee from a solid silver coffee pot of Portuguese design.

Chagas, the only son of old Colonel Lupericio, paid homage to the handsome face and fine eyes of the mestiza girl. A vigorous and free-living youth, a first-rate horse-breaker and lazoer, he had received some little education in the well-known college of Anacleto in the town of Fortaleza.

Not a 'novena'¹ or a dance could possibly be held and he be absent from them, devouring Luizinha with his eyes as she was singing, or squeezing her against his chest in valzes or in polkas, or dancing country dances with her, paying the singers handsomely to chant her praises to the strains of their guitars.

When he was out on any expedition, or shooting in the woods, he usually contrived to pass the siesta in Mapirunga's little house shaded by its tall trees.

He always found Luiza seated in the porch working at lace-making, upon a cushion made of yellow cotton, passing the shuttle through her hands. The brothers generally were out at their work, and the sick mother slept the siesta in a hammock in her own bedchamber.

¹ A 'novena' is a sort of religious gathering at which hymns are sung.

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Then he would talk about his exploits, the tracks of animals that he had seen during his excursion, and tell her how, hidden in the bushes, he had killed a yellow sparrow-hawk, the one that used to eat her chickens, 'but he will eat no more,' he added with just pride.

He always kept her well informed about the feasts and the 'novenas' to be held, and ascertained if she was going to them.

Chagas liked to dwell on dances and amusements they had enjoyed together, especially on one St. John's night, when, by the light of a great bonfire at Encruzilhada, they had become 'compadres,'¹ and then, softening his voice, he used to call her 'minha comadre,' sweetening and dwelling on the words.

Luiza spoke but little, smiling continually with her eyes fixed upon the ground. Yet, when her lover used to look out over the great jungle bathed in the sunlight, and full of birds whose shadows mingled on the ground, she would gaze on him earnestly, as if she saw him for the first time, with her eyes moistened by desire. Then, getting up and shaking out her skirt of

¹ There is nothing in modern English that expresses the relationship of 'compadre' adequately.

In the Elizabethan days, the relationship of 'Gossip' was not unsimilar.

'Compadres' are theoretically two people who agree to be godfather and godmother to the same child.

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thin blue silk, would ask him mincingly, ' Compadre, would you like a little cup of coffee ? ' Then, bring it steaming in a coarse cup of earthenware, and find him writing her name upon the mud floor of the porch with the ramrod of his gun.

Throughout the neighbourhood, all murmured at his visits. Miguel Monte, the store-keeper, often observed them though he appeared never to notice anything, as he passed on horseback by the bank of the stream, upon his way to the ' fazenda ' ¹ of old Lupercio.

Chagas had not a good reputation in affairs of love, for people talked about his seduction of a girl in Quixada, when he was there selling some cattle at a fair.

One evening, Conrado Pataca, a shopkeeper of Sant' Anna, riding his pacing mule slowly along the road, saw something that made him stare. Luiza, with her jar of water on the ground, and Chagas leaning down on the neck of his white horse, were talking earnestly, holding each other's hands. Around them in the dense shadows cast by the palm woods and the bush the soft and noiseless flight of bats and night-jars had commenced, and in the distance a horned owl hooted fitfully.

¹ Fazenda = the Argentine, Estancia, and is used for a country house or a farm.

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Pataca as he passed called loudly ' Good night to you,' which made them start away from one another. Then he at once began to spread the scandal through the neighbourhood. Soon everybody in the district talked of nothing else. Gossiping women, keen to know the smallest details of the private life of all their neighbours, as how much sugar was consumed a week in Colonel Lupercio's house, how many eggs João Loco's hens laid every day, or how many quarts of rum old Celestino bought under the pretence that it was kerosene, sharpened their tongues about the loves of Chagas and of Luizinha.

So much they talked about the matter, that, at last, it came to Mapirunga's ears.

Knowing the character of Chagas, and the fierce pride of his old father, he sought his brother Antonio at his work in the district of Bode, and told him all that he had heard.

To avoid scandal they agreed to watch their sister strictly, but, as they journeyed home talking about the matter, neither suspected that Chagas had accomplished his desire. Meanwhile they had a consultation with their mother, without their sister's knowledge, and told her all they knew. Their mother thought that there was little in the story, and the young people were nothing more than friends, and

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that the whole thing was a trumped-up tale, told by malicious tongues.

Still, for all that, the brothers were not satisfied.

Their mother left off sleeping in the middle of the day, and sat close by her daughter, working at lace-making.

The brothers went to work upon alternate days, one always staying in the house. Even on Sundays they followed the same plan. One or the other was always in the house, dozing beneath the shade of the tall trees, mat-making, or fashioning trees for a pack saddle, preparing bars for the corral, or plaiting whips and lazos of raw hide.

Chagas had ceased to visit them, and, by degrees, confidence returned to all the members of the family.

Little did they suspect that in the small hours of the night, Luizinha quietly would open the back door and steal across the open space behind the house, wrapped in the darkness, to meet her lover in the great cane-brake on the margin of the stream, whose bed of fine clean sand, bared by the drought, ran like a vein of silver through the woods.

Months passed monotonously in the unchanging life of the Sertão. One day Mapirunga had to go with Colonel Lupercio to Jamundaia

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to a cattle marking. Antonio remained at home. As he was cleaning his fowling piece, seated upon a bench, his mother suddenly cried out, terrified.

He sprang upon his feet, and saw his sister fall to the ground, fainting, and pale as death, whilst her lace-making pillow rolled upon the floor.

She seemed all stiffened, and whilst light spasms shook her, deep shadows seemed to blacken all her face.

Headaches and fits of nausea soon revealed her pregnancy.

Mapirunga had returned from Jamundaia with a presentiment of ill.

All seemed awry ; the sky was cloudless ; bands of wood pigeons swooped like a plague upon the fields ; wild ducks in flocks passed with harsh cries as if they were about to migrate ; everything seemed to announce the coming of a period of drought.

During his absence Mapirunga had been watching Chagas carefully and found that he was courting a mulata girl, the daughter of a farmer in Jamundaia, Leocadio by name. His discontent increased as he remarked how thin and how emaciated his sister had become. In a week's time there was no doubt about her state.

His first thought was to kill her, and his

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knife flashed in the air ; but his mother covered her with her body, and then fell fainting into her son's arms. Mapirunga, when he had become a little calmer, said to himself, ' My sister after all is but a girl, and she is weak. Her seducer must marry her, or die.'

Luiza, though desperate, never said a word, and all knew Chagas was the man.

After a violent scene, the brothers carried their mother to her hammock, where she remained fanning herself with a palm leaf, and moaning miserably.

Luiza, thrown into a corner, sobbed gently to herself.

By evening their mother was much worse.

Stifling his fury and his grief, the following day Mapirunga went to the dwelling-house of São Miguel, an old-fashioned Sertanejan ¹ mansion whose doors and gates were painted a bright red with minium. The open space before it stretched out from a leafy group of trees, just at the corner of the road, to where the fence of the corrals began, right to the band of yellow tiles of the verandah floor.

Underneath it there hung wooden cages and perches of bamboo, full of singing birds that sang at all hours of the day. The door was thickly scored with cattle brands, applied to

¹ Adjective formed from Sertão.

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it red hot. Upon it you could see the marks of all the cattle owners of the district, amongst which, often repeated, was an L with a half turn and a hammer claw, the brand of Colonel Lupercio de Barros Cavalcanti, owner of the estate.

A tall man, with a mountain belly, and bearded to the eyes, he was a widower, but lived with a girl he had stolen from Jaguaribe Mirim, and was rich, avaricious, brave, and dominating.

He had the reputation of being a great manipulator of elections, and, therefore, counted with the protection of all those in authority, who had need of his arts. The district feared him and he dominated every one by the terror that his bravos ¹ had inspired in all the neighbourhood.

The chief, and the most feared of all the band of desperadoes,² was known as Bebe-Agua, whose exploits had given him a sinister renown.

Colonel Lupercio was descended from an old feudal family of the Sertão, of which he was inordinately vain, boasting he was of pure white blood, and cherishing a special spite against all members of the coloured race.

This gentleman received Mapirunga lying in

¹ Cangaçeiros from cangaça, a collection of weapons.

² Cangaçeiros.

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a hammock made of cotton cloth, and puffing clouds of smoke from a short corn-cob pipe.

He asked about the luck his visitor had in hunting, and bespoke two opossum skins, well stretched, to send to a friend of his in town.

Mapirunga did not know exactly how to begin what he had come to say.

He murmured something about strayed cattle, and then, with a sudden burst of fury, he demanded, does the Colonel know that Luizinha is with child ?

The colonel looked surprised at the untimely news.

Seated upon a step of the porch, Mapirunga twisted the brim of his heavy leather hat in his rough hands.

Colonel Lupercio muttered, ' What, already, and without being married ; who is the father of the child ? '

' It is your worship's son, young Mr. Chagas,' said Mapirunga, in a hoarse voice, as his eyes gleamed ominously.

Rising to his feet, with an air of definite refusal to discuss the question, Colonel Lupercio answered, ' That is a thing that happens, one day or another, to all the hot-blooded girls of the Sertão. If it had not been Chagas, it would have been some half-breed or another. It is better as it is, for it will purify the race.

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Mapirunga, you can go. I have nothing now for you to do ; but come again at any time you choose. To-morrow I have to go to Itambé, and hope to return home on Thursday afternoon.'

The insulting attitude of the old colonel stung Mapirunga to the quick.

He thought about his sister and her disgrace, his dying mother, and of the want of sympathy he had received. Then, rising to his feet, he advanced and stood before his landlord, as the words burst from his uncultured soul, 'So, sir, you will not make your son marry my sister, after the miserable way he has behaved ?'

At the sound of his excited voice, the bulky form of Bebe-Agua, with his long knife, two palms in length, stuck through his belt, showed itself at the door.

The colonel carelessly waved his arm towards Mapirunga, saying, 'Get out of this, you rascal. Do you think that my son, a man of unmixed blood, would marry a common half-caste girl such as your sister is ? I would rather see him dead, do you hear ? What a piece of impudence ! Move yourself out of this, and quickly, or I will set the dogs upon you.'

The bravo Bebe-Agua slyly sidled up to the edge of the verandah and called and whistled to the dogs.

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‘ Rompe-Nuvem ! Roldão ! Come - Fogo ! Ferrabraz ! Bocca-Preta ! Saca-Rolha ! Apaga-Braza ! ’

The seven thin dogs, with hanging ears, all of one size and colour, their red tongues protruding from their mouths, bounded up and fawned upon the bravo, uttering low growls at the intruder.

Mapirunga controlled himself with a great effort, and retired quietly in silence, biting his thick lips with rage.

There, where he found himself, the colonel had the odds upon his side.

Alone, he felt he could do nothing, and would only die without revenge. That above all things he determined he would never do. It was better far to wait. As he retraced his steps across the patio, he heard the colonel say something to his bravo that made him burst into a laugh.

The sun was setting over the Francos hills, and the melancholy of evening began to invade all the Sertão. Streaks of red gold mingled with the light, white clouds of the still sky.

A negro boy, singing the ‘ Boi Espacio,’ was slowly coming home, with a snare in one hand, and, in the other, a brace of wood pigeons.

The melancholy melody of the song, that celebrates the exploits of the famous beast, sung

Mapirunga

in the strong, clear voice of the young man, mingled and lost itself in the dust-laden air.

*‘ Dos olhos do Boi Espacio
Delles fez-se uma vidraça
Para se espiar as moças
Quando passeiam na praça.’*

At the sound of the song Mapirunga stopped and turned. In front, he saw the colonel's house ; and, on the right, the water of a pond that the setting sun turned to a lake of blood.

A vision of wild revenge possessed him, and, stretching out his arms with his fists clenched, he muttered hoarsely, ‘ I never caught a bull-oek by the tail, and did not throw him. I have never fired and missed my aim. Colonel,’ he said, ‘ you would rather see your son dead than married to my sister. Well, you shall see him dead ; yes, you shall see him.’

He laughed so harshly that an owl, perched on the fence in the shadow of the advancing night, flew away with a hoarse cry, its yellow eyes wide open in its fright.

That night, Mapirunga's mother died.

Day broke next morning with a gloriously clear sky ; but, towards evening, a thick mist began to cover all the firmament.

The heat was terrible.

The birds sought shelter in the thickest of

Mapirunga

the woods. The cries of hawks and vultures now and then broke the brooding silence.

Upon his piebald horse, the best in the Sertão, Caetano Belota, the most trusted herdsman that the colonel had, set off to visit him at São Miguel.

His overalls of yellow untanned leather fitted tightly to his legs ; his feet were rammed into his heavy iron stirrups, hung upon doubled thongs. He wore a herdsman's jacket, made of wild catskin, over his cotton shirt. An overcoat of deerskin to guard him from the thorns hung from his shoulders to his knees. A wide-brimmed hat of goatskin almost hid his rugged features and wide-nostrilled nose, his rough moustache and little twinkling eyes.

Tied to his saddle were his mask, a bell, his lazo, his hobbles, and his saddlebags. These implements showed he was on an expedition to find strayed cattle, and bring them back to the corral. Both horse and man seemed eaten up with sloth.

No one who did not know the life of the Sertão would have suspected that the thin, ill-cared-for looking horse could travel twelve leagues of abominable roads with ease within the day, or that the sunburnt and ill-starred looking rider was in reality a first-class horseman, skilled in the dangerous work of the Sertão.

Mapirunga

As Caetano followed the track along the pond, he saw three saddled horses tied beneath a tree, who snorted as he passed, pawing the ground and jingling their bits. Just as he arrived before the porch, the colonel with his bravo and his son came out and mounted.

‘ Good evening, Caetano,’ they all called out to him.

‘ Good evening to your worships,’ he replied.

‘ Where do you come from ? ’ said the colonel.

‘ From Serra Preta. I went to see if I could find the Spanish cow. Antonio Comelongo said he had news of her ; but it was all a lie. She may have strayed towards Inhambé, for the grass there is good.’

In a melancholy voice, as if he were announcing a mere fact, not a catastrophe, he continued :

‘ If I were you, your worship, I would not ride out to-day, for there is coming a damned lot of rain. This rain, out of the usual time, will spoil the grass, and we shall have a famine in the neighbourhood. When rain is wanted, it never rains. When we don’t want it, it is sure to come. This year we shall have a plague of grubs. The cattle will soon begin to die from want of pasture and, when they fall, maggots will

Mapirunga

breed in every sore upon their skins. This rain will turn out a calamity.'

Chagas agreed with him ; but Bebe-Agua muttered, ' The master has set his mind on setting out, and he intends to sleep at Itambé. We have four good leagues to gallop, and I am afraid the rain will catch us on the way.'

Just as he spoke, a flash of lightning seemed to set the air a-tremble, and a vulture, sitting on the fence of the corral, spread out its wings and flew away.

The colonel spurred his tall bay, vicious-looking horse.

' Let us start at once,' he said ; ' until to-morrow, Caetano.'

' Until to-morrow, if God wishes it.'

Caetano slowly rode down the trail, and, as he turned occasionally in his high saddle, he saw the figures of the three horsemen gradually grow less as they rode steadily across the plain.

Almost at the same moment, Mapirunga and his brother cautiously made their way through the dried-up woods, and hid themselves close to the edge of the road, about half a league from São Miguel.

Crouching behind the trunk of an old zizyphus, their fingers on the triggers of their carbines, their great, straw hats, blackened by the weather, drawn down over their faces, they

Mapirunga

scanned the road that ran between the forest trees.

The yellow leaves of the wild figs and quinces had commenced to strew the ground. The red flowers of the Jitiranas had begun to wither. The air was filled with twigs and leaves driven by the approaching storm. A flash of lightning suddenly lit up the bush, and a strong breeze whistled amongst the branches of the trees. Flash after flash of lightning followed on loud peals of thunder. Great drops of rain pattered like hail upon the leaves. Then, with a roar, the tempest was unchained, lashing as with a million scourges the rugged face of the Sertão.

At a curve of the road, exactly opposite the ambushade, the horsemen slackened their pace, their horses scattering showers of mud on every side of them.

Then two shots sounded out. The horses reared. Colonel Lupercio fell from his tall bay, with his arms spread open, and then lay groaning in the mud.

The cangaçeiro drooped forward on the saddle of his black, white-faced horse, that wheeled and made off with a bound.

He tried to hold on by the pommel of the saddle, but his grip loosened, and he slipped down to the ground, prone and immoveable.

Mapirunga

Both horses rushed into the bush, their saddles in disorder and the stirrups flying in the air.

Chagas alone remained unwounded. The brothers, certain of their prey, had left him untouched to settle up accounts in a last duel with their knives. He bounded to the ground, his knife unsheathed, grinding his teeth, and shouting from the middle of the road, lashed mercilessly by the rain, ' Come on, you miserable cowards, come on ! '

The brothers drew their knives, and a ferocious fight began.

Chagas fought like a jaguar at bay, and the two agile half-breeds attacked him with a mortal hate.

Suddenly Chagas bounded to one side, straightened his arm, and buried his long Parnahyba knife in the broad bosom of Antonio.

There it remained, and all his efforts could not pull it out, for the dead body in its fall carried the knife with it to the ground.

Mapirunga saw his chance and, as the other stooped to extricate his knife, he ran him through the body, under the shoulder blade. Chagas staggered like a drunken man, lifted up both his hands above his head with a hoarse cry, and fell face downwards on the road.

Mapirunga

First of all Mapirunga satisfied himself that his brother really was dead.

Colonel Lupercio still moved a little. Mapirunga lifting him underneath his arms, placed him against the trunk of a mimosa tree. He pushed the body of his son close to him, that the dying man should see him with his fast glazing eyes. Then he stood for a moment, half smiling and half frowning, to contemplate his work.

The rain had caused little rills of blood to mingle with the mud that covered all the clothes of the dead men.

The colonel opened his mouth as if he wished to speak, with his eyes staring wide. Mapirunga, stooping over him, hissed like a rattlesnake, ' You said you wished to see your son dead rather than the husband of a half-breed, you old rogue. You have your wish.'

Colonel Lupercio nodded his head a little, in signal of assent. Then he slipped down into the mud, still leaning on the trunk of the great tree.

Mapirunga took the body of his brother on his back and plunged into the wood.

When he arrived at his rancho of the Bio-Gordo, the rain was slackening, blue ' windows ' made their appearance in the sky, and a fresh feeling seemed to revivify the air. Mapirunga entered his hut, wet to the skin, and tired.

Mapirunga

He laid the bloodstained body of his brother beside that of his mother, wrapped in her shroud, upon a mat, within the porch. The two tall candles that he had lighted on each side of his mother's head before he left the hut, had burned out to the end.

Only two pools of wax remained upon the hard mud floor. He fell upon his knees, and prayed beside the bodies ; then rising up, called gently to his sister. . . . ' Luiza ! ' No answer broke the silence. He called again in a loud voice, ' Luizinha ! '

Still no answer came. He searched the house. No one was in it. Standing upon the doorstep, he shouted loudly, making a speaking trumpet of his hands, held upon each side of his mouth. ' Luiza, oh, Luiza ! '

Still nothing answered. Then he began to search the bushes round the house, and, suddenly, started back with a cry.

From a thick branch of a sweet-smelling Umburana ¹ tree, just where the red flowers of a liana twined round the bough, the body of his handsome sister hung, half disfigured by her pregnancy.

The rain dropped from the hem of her blue petticoat, and her wet cotton shift outlined her swelling breasts.

¹ Buisera Leptophilos.

Mapirunga

Mapirunga understood at once that she had preferred to kill herself, rather than hear the news of the death of him that she had loved.

Going back to the house, he took a hoe and spade, and set to work to dig a grave. In it he placed his brother and his mother, a little way from one another.

The sun was setting and, from the woods, there came the cries of the wild animals.

He cut the hide rope with which Luiza had hanged herself, and brought the body to an empty room above the steps.

Then he poured kerosene upon the doors and the floor, and with a lighted lamp he set the whole ablaze.

In a few minutes the whole hut burned like a bonfire.

By its red, palpitating flames, Mapirunga, mudstained and bloody, looked on with his arms crossed upon his breast, savagely satisfied.

‘All is finished ! Mapirunga is alone in the world, but he has avenged himself,’ he murmured, and added with a savage pride, ‘I never fired a shot in vain, or caught a bullock by the tail, and failed to make him bite the dust.’

